

COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS ON TOURISM  
IMPACTS: A CASE OF UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to evaluate Malaysia's university students' perceptions of the tourism industry in Malaysia, particularly focusing on the differences in perceptions between the Muslim and non-Muslim students.

The rapid development of tourism in the recent years, in line with the country's healthy long-term economic prospects and the government's commitment to tourism, resulted in the increase of employment opportunity in the tourism industry in Malaysia. However, there is a great concern for the participation of the Muslim population in tourism related jobs. Tourism has always being associated with alcohol and general permissiveness by the Muslims. and the two Factors are prohibited by their religion. The findings of the analysis. therefore. reveal some important assumptions that can be useful for future references.

The study proves that there are broadly similar views among the students from both Muslim and non-Muslim respondents. In fact. a very high percentage of the answers stresses the benefits of tourism. In general terms, the majority welcome tourism for economic reasons, and see it as a positive force. However, a distinct minority see some problems arising from tourism. Having said that, it is interesting to note that there is a difference in perceptions between the liberal and orthodox Muslims themselves. Several recommendations are made particularly concerning local community participation in developing an area, and the emphasis on higher education for tourist related areas. All of these will be discussed at length in the next chapters.

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## INTRODUCTION

This study sets out to measure the perception of university students in Malaysia regarding tourism. The problem considered above is a highly interesting and important aspect for Malaysia. Everything seems to suggest that many developing countries look upon international tourism as manna from heaven. Thus, foreign exchange, government revenue, employment, income and regional development are the major benefits the tourism industry can provide. In fact, tourism is Malaysia's fifth largest foreign exchange earner, and is expected to offer many employment opportunities to the population. Like many other developing countries, Malaysia is trying to expand its tourism industry by investing millions of dollars. Apart from that, the country is also trying to diversify its tourism product, from the regular sun, sea and sand holidays to more city oriented holidays. For example, shopping and convention tourism.

Having said that, there are quite a number of studies written regarding tourism in Malaysia, but little is focused on the community's perceptions of tourism. Since the government started to promote tourism seriously as an industry in the early 1980's, many studies are done focusing on the economic advantages of the tourism industry. However, the Malaysians today are beginning to realise the impact of tourism, not only from the positive side but also from the negative side. This issue, moreover, is a serious matter to a country like Malaysia with its plural society. In order to achieve one of the objectives in the New Economic Policy (which will be discussed in the thesis) which is to restructure the society by reducing the imbalance of employment, a careful study must be done regarding the future manpower's willingness to work in a given sector.

Therefore, this study is interested to understand the perceptions of Malaysian's community, focusing on the university students, regarding the tourism industry in

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